

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L CEBU 0087

C O R R E C T E D C O P Y F O R M R N O N L Y (0087 VICE 0086)

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINS, SHUM, RP
SUBJECT: DETENTION OF CHURCH WORKERS IN DAVAO

REF: MANILA 18319

SUMMARY: CEBU CONOFF VISITED DAVAO CITY DECEMBER 14-16
AND DISCUSSED LATE NOVEMBER GOVERNMENT DETENTIONS WITH
LOCAL CIVIC LEADERS AND LIBERAL CHURCHMEN. VISIT PRODUCED FOLLOW-
ING OBSERVATIONS: (1) DETENTIONS DID LITTLE DAMAGE TO ACTIVIST
CHURCH IN DAVAO, AND ACTUALLY BROUGHT IT NEW ALLIES WITHIN CHURCH
AS A WHOLE; (2) HOWEVER, THE SWEEP FURTHER ISOLATED THE ACTIVISTS
FROM INFLUENTIAL SECTORS OF THE FILIPINO COMMUNITY AND RESULTED
IN LOSS OF SEVERAL LAY WORKERS WHO WENT UNDERGROUND TO AVOID
ARREST; (3) EXTENT OF CRACKDOWN LIMITED IN DAVAO CITY AND DAVAO
NORTE BY MODERATION OF LOCAL PHILIPPINE CONSTABULARY (PC)
COMMANDERS; (4) PC COMMANDER OF DAVAO ORIENTAL, WHERE BULK OF
ARRESTS MADE, USED DETENTION ORDERS TO CONDUCT PERSONAL VENDETTA
AGAINST CHURCH AND WAS PROBABLY SACKED FOR THIS; (5) CHURCH SOURCES
BELIEVED CRACKDOWN RESULT OF GOVERNMENT CHAGRIN OVER CHURCH
BOYCOTT ACTIVITIES IN LAST REFERENDUM, PANAMIN PRESSURE, AND
FEAR THAT CHURCH IS SUCCESSFULLY ORGANIZING GROUPS INDEPENDENT
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OF THE GOVERNMENT. END SUMMARY.

1. ON NOVEMBER 19-20, 69 FILIPINO CLERGY AND LAY LEADERS
WERE DETAINED IN DAVAO CITY AND IN THE PROVINCES OF DAVAO
ORIENTAL AND DAVAO NORTE. DXCD, A CHURCH-RUN RADIO
STATION IN TAGUM, DAVAO NORTE, WAS CLOSED. CONTRARY TO

NEWSPAPER REPORTS, ONLY FIVE PERSONS (NOT 20) HAVE BEEN RELEASED.

2. THE ARREST TOTAL WAS RELATIVELY LOW BECAUSE MANY POTENTIAL DETAINEES WENT INTO HIDING BEFORE THEY COULD BE CAUGHT. ADDITIONALLY, CHURCH SOURCES IN DAVAO CITY BELIEVED THE TOTAL ARRESTS THERE WERE BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE OF A NATIONAL MEETING OF CATHOLIC SISTERS, WHO COULD QUICKLY SPREAD NEWS OF THE DETENTIONS. ARRESTS IN DAVAO NORTE WERE REPORTEDLY LESS THAN EXPECTED BECAUSE OF MODERATION OF LOCAL PC COMMANDER. IN DAVAO ORIENTAL, WHERE BULK OF ARRESTS WERE MADE, LOCAL PC COMMANDER APPARENTLY OVERSTEPS HIS AUTHORITY AND CARRIED OUT PERSONAL VENDETTA AGAINST MARYKNOLL FATHERS. CHURCH SOURCES BELIEVE HE WOULD HAVE ARRESTED ANOTHER 300, BUT HE WAS RELIEVED OF HIS COMMAND ON DECEMBER 11 BEFORE HE COULD DO SO.

3. CHURCH SOURCES BELIEVE REASONS FOR CRACKDOWN ARE AS FOLLOWS: (1) TO ELIMINATE GROUPS ORGANIZED INDEPENDENT OF GOVERNMENT CONTROL--HENCE BULK OF ARRESTEES WERE FILIPINO CLERGY AND LAY WORKERS INVOLVED IN "ENCOURAGING PEOPLE TO THINK FOR THEMSELVES"; (2) RETALIATION AGAINST LIBERAL CHURCH FOR ITS INVOLVEMENT IN BOYCOTT OF OCTOBER 16-17 NATIONAL REFERENDUM--CHURCH SOURCES CLAIM LESS THAN 50 PERCENT VOTED IN MINDANAO; (3) PRESSURE FROM PANAMIN HEAD ELIZALDE TO BREAK SUCCESSFUL CHURCH COMPETITION IN ORGANIZING CULTURAL MINORITIES--SEVERAL OF THE ARRESTS WERE REPORTEDLY CONDUCTED BY PANAMIN-SPONSORED AND-ARMED CIVILIAN HOME DEFENSE FORCE (CHDF) MEMBERS. WHEN ASKED ABOUT POSSIBLE LINKS BETWEEN NPA AND DETAINEES, CHURCH SOURCES WERE CONFIDENTIAL

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CONFIDENT THAT "OVER 90 PERCENT" OF DETAINEES HAD NONE. HOWEVER, NO ONE DISMISSED POSSIBILITY OF SOME LINKAGE.

4. CHURCH SOURCES STATED THAT GOVERNMENT ATTEMPTING TO PRESSURE FILIPINO DETAINEES INTO SIGNING STATEMENTS LINKING "WHITE PRIESTS" WITH NPA. TACTICS USED TO PROCURE EVIDENCE INCLUDED: (1) PROMISE OF IMMEDIATE RELEASE ONCE DETAINEE GAVE STATEMENT IMPLICATING THE "BIG FISH"; (2) HAVING ILLITERATE DETAINEES PLACE THUMBPRINT ON WHAT PC TOLD THEM WERE RELEASE PAPERS BUT WERE IN ACTUALITY PREPARED STATEMENTS; (3) BEATINGS (NO MORE REFINED TORTURE HAS BEEN REPORTED AS YET). SOME PEOPLE WHO GAVE SUCH STATEMENTS DISCLAIMED THEM UPON RELEASE, SAYING THEY WERE MADE UNDER DURESS.

5. LIBERAL CHURCH SOURCES WERE IN A WAY DELIGHTED WITH ARREST BECAUSE DETENTIONS LED MANY MODERATE ELEMENTS TO UNITE WITH THE ACTIVISTS (MOST OFTEN CITED EXAMPLE WAS TAGUM BISHOP HOSEPH REGAN, AN AMERICAN MARYKNOLLER). DETENTIONS HAVE "RENEWED

OUR SENSE OF PURPOSE" AMONG LIBERAL CLERGY. HOWEVER, DETENTIONS HAVE FURTHER ISOLATED LIBERAL CHURCH FROM INFLUENTIAL FILIPINO GROUPS AND FORCED SOME OF THOSE WORKING WITH ACTIVISTS TO GO UNDERGROUND AND POSSIBLY JOIN NPA. LOSS OF RADIO STATION DXCD HAS HURT. INCREASED RELIANCE WILL NOW BE PLACED UPON THE "MEMO PRESS", WHICH WILL BE DISTRIBUTED TO LOCAL CONGREGATIONS.

6. CHURCH SOURCES STATED THAT BUKIDNON WAS NOT AS HARD-HIT BECAUSE OF OVERWHELMING GRASSROOTS SUPPORT FOR BISHOP CLAVER AND SOPHISTICATION OF HIS ORGANIZATION. WHEN LOCAL PC ATTEMPTED TO CLOSE CLAVER'S VOCALLY ANTI-GOVERNMENT VISAYAN-LANGUAGE WEEKLY "ANG BANDILYO" CHURCH WORKERS PREVENTED THEM BY POINTING OUT THAT "BANDILYO" WAS NOT INCLUDED ON THE ARREST AND SEIZURE ORDER. THUS ONLY THE RADIO STATION DXBB WAS CLOSED.

7. COMMENT: GOVERNMENT SWEEP HAS DONE LITTLE TO DAMAGE THE ACTIVIST CHURCH IN MINDANAO. NO ONE PLANS TO DISCONTINUE HIS ACTIVITIES. WHILE DXCD WAS CLOSED, THE
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SACKING OF THE DAVAO ORIENTAL PC PROVINCIAL COMMANDER WAS CONSIDERED A VICTORY BY CHURCH SOURCES, AS WAS HEAVY SUPPORT GIVEN BY BISHOP REGAN AND OTHER MODERATES. WHILE SOME FEARS EXPRESSED OVER INCREASED ISOLATION OF ACTIVIST CHURCH FROM NON-CHURCH GROUPS, IT WAS HOPED TO BE SHORT TERM. CHURCH SOURCES WERE UNANIMOUS IN EXPECTING MORE GOVERNMENT ACTION IN THE FUTURE. CHURCH SOURCES, WHILE SOMEWHAT SHAKEN BY THE DETENTIONS, SEEMED PLEASANTLY SURPRISED THAT THE CHURCH HELD UP SO WELL. DETERMINATION TO CONTINUE ALONG ACTIVIST PATH SEEMED STRENGTHENED.
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